

BRANFORD MARSALIS – BIOGRAPHY

NEA Jazz Master, renowned Grammy Award®-winning saxophonist and Tony Award® nominee composer Branford Marsalis is one of the most revered instrumentalists of his time. The three-time Grammy Award® winner has continued to exercise and expand his skills as an instrumentalist, a composer, and the head of Marsalis Music, the label he founded in 2002 that has allowed him to produce both his own projects and those of the jazz world's most promising new and established artists.

Marsalis made his Broadway debut as the composer of original music for the Tony Award® winning Broadway revival of August Wilson's play "Fences". Marsalis received a Tony nomination in the category of category of "Best Original Score (Music and/or Lyrics) Written for the Theatre" and a 2010 Drama Desk Award® for "Outstanding Music in a Play" for his participation. Following these successes, Marsalis was asked to score the 2011 Broadway premiere of "The Mountaintop" starring Samuel Jackson and Angela Bassett.

Leader of one of the finest jazz Quartets today, and a frequent soloist with classical ensembles, Branford has become increasingly sought after as a featured soloist with such acclaimed orchestras as the Chicago, Detroit, Düsseldorf, and North Carolina Symphonies and the Boston Pops, with a growing repertoire that includes compositions by Copland, Debussy, Glazunov, Ibert, Mahler, Milhaud, Rorem and Vaughn Williams. His propensity for innovative and forward-thinking compels him to seek new and challenging works by modern classical composers such as modern Scottish composer Sally Beamish who, after hearing Branford perform her composition "The Imagined Sound of Sun on Stone" at the 2006 North Sea Jazz Festival, was inspired to re-conceive a piece in progress, "Under the Wing of the Rock," which he premiered as part of the Celtic Connections festival Beamish's home country of Scotland in January 2009.

Making his first appearance with the New York Philharmonic in the summer of 2010, Marsalis was again invited to join them as soloist in their 2010-2011 concert series where he unequivocally demonstrated his versatility and prowess, bringing "a gracious poise and supple tone... and an insouciant swagger" (New York Times) to the repertoire.

In 2011, the National Endowment for the Arts conferred the prestigious Jazz Masters Fellowship on the Marsalis Family, a celebration and acknowledgement of a family described by the New York Times as "jazz's most storied living dynasty", who have made an indelible mark, collectively and individually, on the history and the future of jazz, America's art form.

The Branford Marsalis Quartet explores the limits of musical adventure and band cohesiveness on *Four MFs Playin' Tunes* available August 2012. This is the first recording of the tight-knit working band with an electrifying young drummer that joined the band three years ago and the results are a nimble and sparkling album, featuring ambitious original compositions by members of the band, a Thelonious Monk classic, and one standard dating to 1930. The record blends the beautiful and subtle ballad sounds of 2004 release *Eternal* with the ecstatic contrasts of critically-acclaimed *Braggtown*. In other words, this just might be the Branford Marsalis Quartet's most sublime musical achievement yet.

Having gained initial acclaim through his work with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers and his brother Wynton's quintet in the early 1980s, Marsalis also performed and recorded with a who's-who of jazz

giants including Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Herbie Hancock, and Sonny Rollins. He has also collaborated with such diverse artists as Sting, the Grateful Dead and Bruce Hornsby. His expansive interests are further reflected in his explorations in film, radio and television, including his role as the musical director of The Tonight Show with Jay Leno for two years in the early 1990s. Marsalis has also acted in such popular movies such as *Throw Mama from the Train* and *School Daze*, provided music for *Mo' Better Blues* and other films and hosted National Public Radio's syndicated program *Jazz Set*.

Dedicated to changing the future of jazz in the classroom, Marsalis has shared his knowledge at such universities as Michigan State, San Francisco State, Stanford and North Carolina Central, with his full Quartet participating in an innovative extended residency at the NCCU campus. Beyond these efforts, he is also bringing a new approach to jazz education to student musicians and listeners in colleges and high schools through Marsalis Jams, an interactive program designed by Marsalis in which leading jazz ensembles present concert/jam sessions in mini-residencies. Marsalis Jams has visited campuses in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast and Southwest, and later established an ongoing Marsalis Berklee Jams series with the Berklee College of Music.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans native joined forces with friend Harry Connick, Jr. to conceive the New Orleans Habitat Musicians' Village, the newly constructed community in the city's historic Upper Ninth Ward that provides new homes for displaced residents, including displaced musicians and their families. At the heart of the Village stands the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music, a magnificent facility with performance, instructional and practice spaces and a recording studio.

Whether on the stage, in the recording studio, in the classroom or in the community, Branford Marsalis embodies a commitment to musical excellence and a determination to keep music at the forefront.